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SUBJECT: A FRUSTRATED FIJI INTERIM GOVERNMENT

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Classified By: Amb. Dinger. Sec. 1.4 (B,D).

The IG and the PIF Working Group

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11. (C) The PIF-Fiji Joint Working Group held its 30th meeting this morning, with interim AG Sayed-Khaiyum present. We are told S-K made very clear the IG view that the next elections must be under a reformed electoral system, and election timing will depend on electoral-reform progress. He indicated the aim is for Fiji to be divided into five electoral constituencies, with parties having candidate lists, under a proportional representation model. Asked how such reform is possible absent a lawfully elected parliament in place, S-K indicated several possible approaches, including recalling parliament, holding a referendum, or bringing together a "constituent assembly." He suggested the NCBBF already looks a lot like such a constituent assembly. Contacts tell us S-K attacked Australia and New Zealand for not cooperating in the effort to build a better Fiji. He also mentioned in passing his continued irritation with U.S. visa sanctions, which he sees as inconsistently applied: allowing a visit by the Health Minister but refusing his own recent visit request. The Fiji side in the meeting reportedly left an impression that the IG may pull the plug on participating in the Working Group, blaming the Aussies and Kiwis for obstructing progress. The meeting's agreed outcomes document noted that the IG's present position "represents a modification of commitments to the Forum to conduct elections by March 2009 and noted that political levels would have to consider the Forum's response.

Qarase endorses some electoral reform

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12. (C) Deposed PM Qarase told the media on June 19 that his SDL Party endorses a proposal by deposed Vice President Madreiwiwi that reform of Fiji's electoral system to proportional representation should take place. Qarase accepted that the present alternative vote system with a majority of communal seats has not cured Fiji's race-based voting patterns. Qarase said ethnic Fijians, now a clear majority, no longer need communal seats to protect their interests. He noted that others -- ethnic Indians and "generals" -- do need assurance of minority representation. When Madreiwiwi put forth his view, he added that any major changes to Fiji's electoral system need to be accomplished after elections with a legitimate parliament in place, not before. Presumably Qarase would agree. We have heard from a close Qarase contact that the June 17 meeting between Bainimarama and Qarase, the second in recent weeks, was a continuation of the first: Bainimarama lectured Qarase to change his views and endorse the IG's reform efforts. There

was no sense of negotiation.

#### Upcoming visits to Fiji

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13. (C) We hear that the PIF Ministerial Group set up in Auckland to monitor the Fiji situation currently plans to visit Suva July 14-15, prior to the PIF leaders' Niue meeting in August. The dates have not been vetted with the IG yet. The PIF wants the Chair, Tonga's PM Sevele, to do so; he has not yet acted. Given the impression that the IG is quite frustrated with the PIF at the moment, some wonder if Bainimarama might refuse to permit the Ministerial visit. Meanwhile, we have heard further confirmation that the UN SYG and Commonwealth SG responses to President Iloilo's request for support for an electoral-reform forum did not provide what the IG wanted: no endorsement of the forum approach, no offer of resources, no naming of envoys to oversee events. Still, the Commonwealth offered for Sir Paul Reeves to return to attempt to facilitate high-level dialogue, and Bainimarama has blessed such a visit (even though Iloilo's letter specifically dismissed the idea of a continuing Reeves role). Tentatively, Reeves, with perhaps some UN accompaniment, is to visit Suva again at the end of June.

#### Comment

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14. (C) Our impression that Bainimarama and the IG would work to delay elections well beyond March 2009 is becoming the reality on the ground. Certainly, electoral reforms would make sense, from a Western democratic perspective; but such reforms need to be accomplished in a legitimate

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political process. We hear interim AG Sayed-Khaiyum complained today at the PIF Working Group session that politicians tarnished the Reeves Commission's proposed electoral system for Fiji's constitution when the package came to Parliament in 1997. Arguably that is the case; but in the end elected law-makers do need to apply their political judgment to any proposed system. We expect an attempt to impose the IG's "ideal" system at gun point will not go down well with the broader populace of Fiji, particularly with the ethnic Fijians who in general do not trust the IG to protect their interests.  
DINGER